Safe and Drug-Free Schools-Mentoring Programs Grant
Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Should we only include relevant literature and research in the "Quality of the Project Design" section, or should we incorporate it throughout the application? And if we should incorporate the relevant research in other sections, how can we prevent being too repetitive?

A: This question raises several issues. First make sure that you answer to the best of your ability every issue or sub question within the given selection criteria. Do not make the reviewers hunt for the answers to their questions. This might frustrate them and could be reflected in your application's score. Clear, concise, and detailed answers are required. So you should demonstrate that you have done your homework in terms of knowing the most up to date research findings for implementing a mentoring project in this section. Websites such as www.mentoring.org or the www.dropoutprevention.org/effstrat/effstrat.htm could be helpful in gathering such data.

The "Quality of the Project Design" section is worth 30 points of the total score. Ten possible points come from your discussion of the relevant research. It is important to convince the readers that you are not only aware of the research conducted, but understand how to best incorporate that research into your proposed grant project to meet your community's needs.

While you want to make sure that you earn the points in the "Quality of Design" section, it will not hurt your application to refer to research findings in other sections, where appropriate. The relevant literature and research findings are the rationale or "the why you are doing this" portion of the application.

Can you be too repetitive or too long-winded? Yes. The application is your 25 page letter to the reviewers for the sole purpose of persuading them that your application is THE one they should recommend for funding. Having a page limit—even a suggested page limit in this case—helps the writer know when to stop. But the issue of overkill is a line all writers have to learn not to cross. Writing is more art than science in this case. Our suggestion is to have someone read it and ask them if it is becoming repetitive. For less experienced grant writers, however, we'd recommend emphasizing your research over downplaying it, unless your proposal is over 30 pages in length.

Q: What is the appropriate ratio or per dollar amount to spend per student?

A: There is no magic number we can share with you. The best we can emphasize to you is that the **quality** of the services offered is more important than the quantity of services or the number of students served. Don't worry if you can only serve 20 students; and don't think that proposing to serve 100 students will make you a more desirable applicant. Sixty-five percent of your score comes from the "Quality of the Project

Design" and the "Quality of the Project Management." You must focus on meeting the needs you have outlined in the Need section of the application and base your project around addressing those issues. Determining the needs of your community and the number of mentors you are able to recruit will go a long way in determining the number of students you can serve. It is estimated that, for the award ranges of $100,000 to $200,000, applicants could work with anywhere from 25 to 100 students - it just depends on the type of services that you are offering.

Q: How much of the budget should we allocate for the evaluation?

A: Again, there is no magic number. When asked this question, we have estimated that an evaluation could cost around $5,000 and perhaps more, depending on the region of the country you are in and to what extent an evaluation tool needs to be developed. The evaluation is an important part of the application (15 points) and should not be an afterthought. It is as important to be able to measure the success of your project as it is to provide the services, so during the development phase of deciding what your project will look like, you should be thinking about the evaluation as well.

All applicants should seek guidance on the typical costs of an evaluation in their area. Whether CBOs are submitting a joint application with an LEA or submitting it on their own, talk to individuals in the local schools who have more experience with evaluating academic programs. When selecting an evaluator to work on your grant project, we recommend asking for a breakdown of their specific costs so you know what you are getting for your money.

Q: Is a control group required for the evaluation?

A: No, it is not required. The key is to measure improvement of the students served. Pre- and post tests, report cards, as well as other indicators you project could determine useful in the evaluation should be considered.

Q: When a CBO partners with two school districts for a joint application, what is the CBO's responsibility to the private schools in the districts? Do they have to be contacted individually, and, if so, should they be contacted by the LEA or CBO?

A: Remember: a CBO cannot possibly work with every school in their area. Your project can propose to work with students in grades 4-8, deemed at-risk (based on the application package) who attend public and private schools, including religious schools and charter schools. And the competitive priority is not exclusive to a joint application between a CBO and a public school district (LEA). A charter school, a private school or an independent school district could also be a part of a joint application.

Quality over quantity is the rule. The size of your target area, the number of mentors you can recruit, and the number of students who are of need will all help answer this question for you. And while there are many students who would benefit from a mentoring relationship, it is doubtful that your project would be able to provide an effective mentoring relationship for all of the students in your area.

Q: May we propose to add more students to the project in the future years of the project?

A: To the best extent possible, your project should continue to serve the students from the first year of the project throughout the life of the grant. In this way, we are able to measure the effectiveness of the project and provide potentially long-term assistance to specific students. It certainly is permissible to submit an application where you envision expanding your project in years two and three. If you go this route, make sure that you will maintain the same ratio of mentors to students you propose for year one, so plan to recruit more mentors and state this clearly for the reviewers. If you don't increase the number of mentors, explain why.

Q: Will it hurt us if we don't have a 1:1 ratio between our mentors and students? What if we want a 1:1 ratio but are not successful in achieving this goal.

A: A 1:1 ratio is the ideal but not required for this grant. Recruiting and retaining good mentors can be difficult. If you won't have a ratio of 1:1 between mentors and students explain what the ratio will be, why that will be, and emphasize the benefits of this situation. For instance, if a mentor is working with two or three students, discuss the merits of small group learning, modeling appropriate behavioral norms, etc.

If you plan on a 1:1 ratio but don't make that goal, it is more of an issue for reporting during the project period than for the writing phase. However, a good proposal will have contingency plans ready to implement if something goes awry. Demonstrate to the reviewers that you have a vision for what you want to happen and how you will overcome and adapt to obstacles in your way.

In your application, apologize for nothing. Explain the reality of your situation and convince the readers that your rationale makes sense and that your decision is a logical conclusion.

Q: What is the GEPA statement I have to include in the proposal?

A: This is the applicant's statement regarding Section 427 of the General Education Provision Act that requires applicants to ensure that neither participants nor staff will be denied participation in the project. It is not meant to be a duplication of the Civil Rights laws, but there are similarities. What you as an applicant should know is the following:

1. You have to have a GEPA statement included in the application. Our recommendation is to note its page in the table of contents and include it as a separate page in the appendix. You shouldn't really address the GEPA statement in your narrative. It should be a stand-alone statement that is easily identified, if possible.

2. While the GEPA statement is required to be in the application, it does not affect your application score. The reviewers do not evaluate the quality of the statement, yet this doesn't mean you should disregard its importance. There is no minimum length, but a paragraph to a half page would be appropriate.

3.The GEPA statement is an opportunity for you to consider obstacles from students being able to participate in the project and individuals to be hired. What you should do is consider the issues that would keep your project from succeeding. For example, geography, poor roads, and distance between potential mentors and students could all be issues. State the obstacles and briefly discuss how you will overcome such issues. GEPA asks you, the applicant, to proactively consider potential problems that may arise and the solutions you will implement so that the project will proceed.

Q: Are there any specific guidelines for the assurances we have to include in the application, and is a legal contract reviewed by lawyers required for the joint application?

A: Aside from the standard certifications and assurances (Drug-Free Workplace, Non-construction, etc) included in the application package, there is no standard form for the assurances that applicants for the Mentoring program must complete. Providing the detail asked for in the specific assurances will be sufficient.

In terms of the partnership agreement for the joint application, a signed statement by the appropriate official for each of the organizations outlining the roles and responsibilities of each party is adequate. And remember, joint applications may be submitted by a combination of the following eligible organizations: a) at least one LEA and at least one CBO that is not a school and that provides services to youth and families in the community; or (b) at least one private school that qualifies as a nonprofit CBO and at least one other CBO that is not a school and that provides services to youth and families in the community. Please note, individual public schools are not eligible to sign a joint application. A CBO may partner with a specific public school, but must have the school district (LEA) that is over that specific school sign the joint application.

Q: If we are working with multiple school districts, do we need a partnership agreement with each one? What about multiple non-profits working together as well?

A: If you are submitting a joint application, each of the LEAs and CBOs should be included. If all of these organizations will be receiving grant dollars, it is an absolute must. To receive the competitive priority you must have at least one of each type of entity listed in the application package. You can collaborate with as many organizations as feasible and necessary for your project. While there is no matching requirement for this program, strong community buy-in will strengthen your proposal. The only word of caution is to make sure that a large collaboration is manageable and that roles and responsibilities are outlined and every organization lives up to the commitments it has pledged.

Q: How many required trips do project staff have to attend?

A: You should budget for three trips a year for two staff members—usually the project director and another staff person—lasting around three days. For planning purposes, keep in mind increases in costs for flights and hotels for years two and three.

Q: On page 49 in the Q & A section, it states that grant funds may not be used for events, food, awards, etc. Yet in the *Sample Quality Proposal* (page 12) that is posted on your Web site, it lists t-shirts, pens, appreciation meals and year-end recognition events as incentive strategies for retaining mentors. There is no mention of other resources that are contributing to these activities. Is there a particular wording to use so these expenses are allowed or, if it needs to be contributions from other sources, do we need to have MOUs to substantiate the contribution?

A: All applicants should know that project funds cannot be used for the purchasing of food, awards, incentives, or activities deemed as "entertainment." Also unallowable under the grant is any type of reimbursement for the mentors aside from the cost of their training for this grant project.

The sample proposal, reproduced from a previous competition, does outline those activities, and it is not clear (without a budget narrative) how those items were purchased. We realize that it may be confusing to prospective applicants and emphasize the importance of following the guidelines in the 2004 application package for this competition.

In speaking with program staff, they have made it clear that grantees cannot use project funds for these activities. Grantees may pay for such items with funding not from the grant. Contributions or donations from other organizations or individuals would be acceptable. While there is no matching requirement for this competition, and such contributions for "entertainment" purposes would not qualify as match, highlighting the community support of the project for these activities would not hurt the applicant in the eyes of the reviewers. Such community support would not overshadow an applicant's ability to fully address the selection criteria.

Q: What do I need to know about the protection of human subjects in my project?

A: This is an important issue that all of us need to take seriously. It is also one that, for the majority of applicants, will not be an issue. Block 12 of the SF424 asks whether or not your project will conduct human subject research. Page 55 of the application package asks that you provide a narrative if your project is conducting human subject research. If you answer "yes," you will have to address whether your project's research is exempt or nonexempt. This requires a brief narrative of potentially 1-3 pages.

Most research conducted by the Department of Education is exempt from review by an Internal Review Board (IRB).

Most of the applicants can either state that their project does not include human subject research or that it is exempt research. To learn more about the protection of human subjects in research, please visit www.ed.gov/policy/fund/guid/humansub/overview.html.

The most important thing to know is to make sure your project does not harm the student. And of course make sure that personal information learned is not shared or in any way made public.

Q: Any last tips or suggestions for hopeful grant writers?

A: Make sure that the goals and objectives you identify are clearly and coherently aligned with the program's performance indicators and address the needs you have already identified in the application. Make sure that activities you list in the applications are readily understood to be connected with the specific goals and objectives you have identified. Everything in your application must go back to meeting the stated need. Demonstrate to the reviewers you have a clear plan of where your project is beginning and where you want this project to be at the grant's end three years from now.